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Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS
1942

INDEX

Stage Play	Pages
Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning	252, 253, 254
All in Favor	380, 381, 382
All the Comforts of Home	280, 281, 282
Autumn Hill	314, 315, 316
†*Beat the Band	204, 205, 206
Broken Journey	265, 266, 267
*By Jupiter	274, 275, 276
Cafe Crown	370, 371, 372, 373
Candida	301, 302, 303
Cat Screams (The)	270, 271, 272
Comes the Revelation	278, 279, 280
*Count Me In	214, 215, 216
*Eve of St. Mark (The)	211, 212, 213
First Crocus (The)	397, 398, 399
Flowers of Virtue (The)	354, 355, 356
Guest in the House	336, 337, 338
Harlem Cavalcade	296, 297, 298
Heart of a City	346, 347, 348
Hedda Gabler	358, 359, 360, 361
*Hello, Out There	223, 224, 225
I Killed the Count	248, 249, 250
*Janie	244, 245, 246
Jason	377, 378, 379, 380
Johnny on a Spot	391, 392, 393
Johnny 2X4	326, 327, 328
Keep 'Em Laughing	306, 307, 308
Kiss for Cinderella (A)	332, 333, 334
Lady Comes Across	388, 389, 390
Laugh, Town, Laugh!	268, 269, 270
Let Freedom Sing	216, 217, 218
Life of Reilly (The)	298, 299, 300
Lily of the Valley	365, 366, 367, 368
*Magic	223, 224, 225
Moon Is Down (The)	318, 319, 320
Morning Star (The)	239, 240, 241
Nathan the Wise	321, 322, 323
New Priorities of 1943	236, 237, 238
Papa Is All	394, 395, 396
Plan M	342, 343, 344
Porgy and Bess	373, 374, 375, 376
Priorities of 1942	329, 330, 331
Rivals (The)	384, 385, 386, 387
*Show Time	234, 235, 236
Solitaire	362, 363, 364, 365
*Star and Garter	262, 263, 264
*Strip for Action	220, 221, 222
Talking to You	252, 253, 254
The Strings, My Lord, Are False	287, 288, 289
They Should Have Stood in Bed	349, 350, 351
This Is the Army	256, 257, 258, 259
*Three Men on a Horse	209, 210
Top-Notchers (Keep 'Em Laughing)	306, 307, 308
*Uncle Harry	284, 285, 286
Under This Roof	339, 340, 341
*Vickie	230, 231, 232
Walking Gentleman (The)	292, 293, 294
What Big Ears	309, 310
*Wine, Women and Song	226, 227
Yesterday's Magic	312, 313, 314

PRODUCTIONS CONTINUING

Reviews appeared in the 1941 CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS

Stage Play	1941 Vol. Pages
*Angel Street	182, 183, 184, 185
*Arsenic and Old Lace	417, 418, 419, 420
*Blithe Spirit	237, 238, 239, 240
*Claudia	378, 379, 380, 381
*Junior Miss	211, 212, 213, 214
*Let's Face It	249, 250, 251, 252
*Life With Father	489, 490, 491
*My Sister Eileen	445, 446, 447
*Sons o' Fun	193, 194, 195, 196

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play during the week of October 19, 1942.*
†"Beat the Band" opened Wednesday, October 14th, at the Forty-sixth Street Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN

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"Beat the Band"

NEW YORK TIMES
October 15, 1942

In 'Beat the Band' the Brass Players Blow a Music Show Into the Forty-sixth Street Theatre for George Abbott

By BROOKS ATKINSON

"BEAT THE BAND" Mr. Abbott calls the new musical comedy that he put on at the Forty-sixth Street last evening. The verb is well chosen. For Johnny Green's score, which runs a considerable temperature, is written on the downbeat in the idiom of tomorrow. And Mr. Abbott, a celebrated bistro hoofer, has beaten his chorus and company into dancing at top speed and his musicians into performing loud. When you pay your respects to his jitterbugging carnival, sit away from the brasses. They are in full and splendid cry.

An old hand at trying new things, Mr. Abbott has hired the most enterprising composer of the season and George Marion, Jr., the wittiest writer of lyrics and to do everything right, he has rounded up an unhackneyed cast of performers. To keep every one on his toes, Mr. Abbott has collaborated with Mr. Marion on a book that retains the best features of a casting agent, a popular band leader and an affectionate young heiress from a Caribbean island. Getting all these people on the same stage involves more second-story work than you find in most musical comedy books. But once they are assembled you can listen to some super-heated music and gaze at some animated zoot-suit dancing in a vivid modern vein.

* * *

Since no one but Irving Berlin has been writing music with enthusiasm for a good many months, it is a pleasure to encounter in Mr. Green a man who likes his profession. Smart is an ugly word, but it will have to do as a description of his style. "Song of Two Islands" is a superb number in a vein of brass-tongued romance. And when Mr. Green is scribbling stuff for a band on a holiday he is in top form; he keeps every instrument working at top efficiency. No one can take a rest when he plays one of Mr. Green's tornadoes.

Not that his style is particularly good for singing. Some of his songs are so civilized that they seem to have no notes at all. On the voice they sound less like music than a clearing of the throat. Mr. Green has set Jack Whiting and Susan Miller some very nice problems in making songs sound like music. Take him away from the saxophone, as Mr. Green is more technician than musician.

And take Mr. Abbott away from the night clubs and he is a first-rate man of the theatre. He has extraordinarily good taste in performers. Susan Miller is a lovely young lady with a radiant personality and a sense of comedy; and Eunice Healey is the perfect counterpart in dancing. As the casting agent Romo Vincent is fat and funny, with remarkable versatility. As the life of the party Jerry Lester is comically breezy. Jack Whiting has not been in such good form for two or three seasons. Give Leonard Sues credit for some frisky trumpet-playing, and Johnny Mack credit for some crisp and frenzied dancing.

To make "Beat the Band" look as striking as possible, Samuel Leve has designed a sententious curtain and a luxurious penthouse interior. As costume designer, Freddy Wittop has not libeled the modes. Although "Beat the Band" is not one of Mr. Abbott's most triumphant festivals, it is fresh, interesting and overflowing with vitality. But beware of the brasses. They are on fire.

NEW YORK POST
October 15, 1942

"Beat the Band" Marches Into the Forty-sixth Street

By WILELLA WALDORF

GEORGE ABBOTT opened his season at the Forty-sixth Street Theatre last night with "Beat the Band," a rather monotonous musical comedy relieved here and there by some rhythmic dance numbers staged by David Lichine, and brilliant trumpeting by Leonard Sues.

"Beat the Band" suffers from one of the most enervating books in recent musical comedy history. It seems Damon Dillingham, a temperamental dance-band leader, has subleased a penthouse apartment from a man name Higgins, whose god-daughter promptly arrives from South America to learn about life in New York. Damon, whose fiancee has just jilted him, poses as Higgins. Anybody who can't go on from there has never seen a musical comedy before and will probably be enchanted with "Beat the Band," even to George Marion, Jr.'s lyrics.

Mr. Marion stems from the self-consciously clever clan of lyricists who seem always to be straining horribly for a smart effect. It was obvious what we were in for early in the evening when Romo Vincent, as an actors' agent, told a bevy of beauties: "You sound like a bunch of morons. You can't all be Gertrude Lawrence," or words to that effect.

Back in the bad old days, there must have been a special thumb-screw for perpetrators of rhymes like that.

"Steam on the Beam"

But instead of dwelling on the iniquities of "Beat the Band," let us endeavor to recall some of its happier moments.

Leonard Sues' trumpeting was something to hear, and his specialty with a marionette-figure in one hand amusingly done. The boogie-woogie to Johnny Green's peppiest music, "Steam on the Beam"—laid in the boiler-room of a Washington hotel—was hot stuff. Otherwise, unfortunately, Mr. Green's score had a distressing tendency to blend in with the general monotony, despite the vocal efforts of Romo Vincent, the fat man with an ingratiating way about him, and Susan Miller, a new leading lady with an attractive personality.

Eunice Healey, Marc Platt and Johnny Mack danced skillfully, and Jerry Lester indicated that he might be a funny comedian of the Bert Lahr school under other circumstances. Some of his writhing and noise-making was diverting, but more often than not the book threw him.

Ralph Bunker had some merry moments as a deaf music publisher, and Juanita Juarez, a fiery South American, sang her one number well but was otherwise required merely to wiggle and wear revealing costumes. Jack Whiting as the band leader took it all jauntily.

Passionate admirers of dance-bands will probably find "Beat the Band" of interest, for the musicians know their stuff, and when their tooting and drumming is combined with the gyrations of the chorus in an abandoned mood, the show comes suddenly to life. But not often enough to suit this reporter.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
October 15, 1942

Mr. Abbott Flops As a Bandleader

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE moral of *Beat the Band* would seem to be that you can't make a good highball with bad whiskey, no matter how much fizz you squirt into it. George Abbott has gone about his first musical enterprise of the season with his customary bounce and zip, making everybody on the stage behave most of the time like a bright red fire engine. The boys and the girls stamp their feet and clap their hands and lift their voices as though they were trying to establish communication with Mars. Since the show is concerned with a temperamental orchestra leader, it tosses in, without the least bit of trouble, a good hot band that can probably be heard in the far reaches of Mt. Morris Park. Leonard Sues is probably one of the best, and unquestionably one of the most ear-splitting, of trumpeters; a mere echo of his blasts would have done all that was needed at Jericho. And just to play in with all the rest Freddy Wittop's costumes are about the loudest ensembles that have come to town since the circus.

But for all its frantic working of the pump handle, *Beat the Band* can't make much water flow. It is one more musical which is cursed with a dull, slow, and pointless book. The gags, one after another, fall much flatter than there is any reason to expect in an Abbott show. And Johnny Green's score is not counterbalancing; indeed, on the whole it is a disappointment. *Steam Is On the Beam* is a hot and lusty tune that sets off the best stage commotion of the evening, and *Every Other Heartbeat* is catchy, though commonplace. But for the most part the tunes are pretty undistinctive; and George Marion's lyrics, far from being witty, are almost never crisp. As a result, *Beat the Band* never is very exciting for all its noisiness, and never very gay for all its rushing around.

It's all somewhat unfortunate, not merely because a lot of Abbott pep has gone to waste, but because the tale of an explosive band leader, with a full-sized band to exhibit on the stage, should fit better than most plots into musical comedy.

Jack Whiting makes an agreeable band leader, and Jerry Lester and Romo Vincent work hard, if not too brilliantly, in comedy roles. Johnny Mack does some lively dancing, and so does the chorus. But the most attractive member of the cast is Susan Miller, who is making her Broadway debut as the ingenue. Miss Miller, who is very blonde and blue-eyed, is good to look at, can handle a song, be young without being too cute, and has assurance without aggressiveness. Last night seemed like the beginning of a promising career.

"Beat the Band"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 15, 1942

'Beat the Band' Is Spotted With New Faces, Energy, Jive

"Beat the Band," musical comedy by George Marion Jr. and George Abbott. Produced by George Abbott at the 46th St. Theatre, New York, Oct. 14, 1942.

★ ★ ★—

By BURNS MANTLE

MASTER ABBOTT evidently assembled this one from the night clubs. "Beat the Band" boasts a cast of principals better known to the hot spots than to the dark spot that is wartime Broadway. There is a jam session in it, and a variety of music known as jive.

The leading newcomer is Susan Miller, an appealing young lady with no more than a nickel's worth of voice, but a very nice nickel's worth. Susan has sung with Rudy Vallee and Earl Carroll. Her manner is curiously knowing and naive at the same time.

Her mother, says the program, still has to sign her contracts, the intimation being that if the WAACs or the WAVEs decide to lower their age of admission to the new 18-19 level Susan will be eligible.

Susan, I think, does a lot to make "Beat the Band" enjoyable.

Helping her is a busy comedian just off the floor named Jerry Lester. Jerry, too, has been around long enough to have attracted a night club following and is a fellow of great energy. The Broadway stage is meeting him for the second time.

Second Trip

He came east first with one of Earl Carroll's lesser "Vanities" in 1940. Like that other popular floor comedian who recently took a stage flier, Joe Lewis, Jerry is still searching for a groove. Some day he'll find it.

Romo Vincent is also a new-comer. Romo is another fat man who is light on his feet and proud of it. He sings songs, too, and when they are worth singing he sings them very well.

There are a couple of band boys of unusual gifts—the Leonard Sues, trumpeter, who was with "Johnny 2x4," and Johnny Mack, who doubles a nice tap-dancing talent with the drummer's job in the band.

Another exceptional dancer, too, is Marc Platt. He used to be Marc Platoff when he was with the Ballet Russe. They do not give Marc much of a chance in this night club show, but he makes much of little in a ballet illustrating one of the better songs, "Let's Comb Beaches."

And there is Eunice Healy, who is always dependable.

I tell you of the talents first because there is not a great deal to be said for the George Marion Jr.-George Abbott story in "Beat the Band," and little to enthuse over in the music written for it by Johnny Green.

Johnny's Jam

Johnny, too, hails from the hot spots. Or so I imagine. He is strong for jive. I could live contentedly for years and years if I never heard another note of it.

Naturally, I think this is a dull, unmelodious score. But there were many people in last night's $6.60 audience who loved Johnny's jam session, built around a number called "The Steam Is on the Beam."

Incidentally, "Beat the Band" tells of a South American orphan who comes to New York looking for her godfather and finds Jack Whiting. Very nice for Jack, who is a hot band leader, and a likeable juvenile.

The best of the romantic duets is one called "Every Other Heartbeat," and it seemed to me Miss Miller sang her entrance song, "Song of Two Islands," very sweetly.

A full-stage finale, "America Loves a Band," is full of action and color, but there again the music is not as rousing as promised.

"Beat the Band" is staged and costumed with Abbott class, Master George doing the directing himself and David Lichine of the ballet looking after the dance numbers with good inventiveness and a frequent ballet touch.

'BEAT THE BAND'

A musical comedy in two acts, book by George Marion Jr. and George Abbott; music by Johnny Green, lyrics by Mr. Marion, dances by David Lichine, settings by Samuel Leve, costumes by Freddy Wittop, direction by Mr. Abbott, who presented it at the Forty-sixth Street Theater on October 14, 1942. The cast:

Buster Da Costa	Romo Vincent
Veronica	Joan Caulfield
Hugo Dillingham	Jerry Lester
Willow Willoughby	Toni Gilman
Mr. Pirosh	Ralph Bunker
Princess	Eunice Healey
Damon Dillingham	Jack Whiting
Dancer	Marc Platt
Doorman	James Lane
Drummer	Johnny Mack
Trumpet Player	Leonard Sues
Band Girl	Evelyn Brooks
Mamita	Juanita Juarez
Querida	Susan Miller
Don Domingo	Averell Harris
First Detective	Brian Connaught
Second Detective	John Wray
Hotel Manager	Clift Dunstan
Bell Girl	Doris Dowling
Hotel Owner	John Clarke

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
October 15, 1942

Play by Eminent George Abbott and George Marion, Jr., Is Presented

By JOHN ANDERSON

AS BOSS man at Cartier's, Jules Glaenzer is my favorite diamond-monger, and since he is a punctilious First Nighter, who deals in stones without throwing them, I like to listen to his gentle comments.

"You must admit, my dear Anderson," he said at the opening of 'Beat the Band' last night at the 46th St. theatre, "you must admit that you are delightfully surprised."

"I will admit," I said, "my dear Glaenzer, that I agree wholeheartedly with that statement if you strike out the word 'delightfully.'"

For the truth is that I am not only surprised, I am astonished that the eminent George Abbott, the smart Mr. Abbott, the astute and showmanly Mr. Abbott, the same Mr. Abbott who has given the town some of its brightest and happiest musicals, could have produced a show that is so stupendously uninteresting.

It seems almost to explore new regions of disinterest, and to cover most of the old ones, like a rummage in the warehouse.

Its book, written by Mr. Abbott and George Marion, Jr., is a veritable anthology of outworn stencils and so unsafe as a vehicle that its actors must suffer continuously from plot-fright.

Johnny Green's music is agreeable, and there are a couple of vivid dances, energetically staged by David Lichine, which give the big numbers a fine anatomical hysteria, but even they didn't seem to interest the audience as much as they did the cast.

Since Mr. Abbott is one of the national treasures, celebrated for fresh and original showmanship, the present situation verges on a civilian emergency. In desperation, I should think, he would send someone out to see a man about a gag.

It would undoubtedly be a better show if it didn't have any book at all, since its efforts to make sense are dismal and its efforts to make nonsense even worse. It concerns a famous bandleader who is always punching his sponsor in the eye, a peculiar optical habit which invariably estranges his sweetheart.

Even more peculiar is the band-leader's backward brother who, in ways too complicated to mention, takes over the band-leader's apartment, poses as the former landlord, and so accepts custody of what he thinks is a child of wealthy South American parents sent to New York to be carefully chaperoned.

Surprise, surprise, the "child" turns out to be a clever young lady who falls in love with . . . but what's the use? Call it Grade G drivel and leave it at that.

Since the plot hangs around all evening like a consolidated bore, it is impossible to sneak off to one side of the stage and enjoy the rest of it. There are pleasant people involved who could undoubtedly whip up a delightful evening if they weren't forever obliged to dodge the droopy drawers book.

Given anything like a break with material, roly-poly Romo Vincent and Jerry Lester could probably give good account of themselves. Their present efforts to reach the assembled funnybones seem about as hopeless as a man trying to pole-vault in a diving suit.

Juanita Juarez suggests admirably the sultry abandon of a Latin comedienne, but she might as well try running around the block to get laughs. Leonard Sues, who could probably give Gabriel lessons on the trumpet (God forbid!) and who has a likeable gift for unassuming comedy, remains simply a wonderful trumpet player, which is a lot, but not enough considering his present opportunity.

Susan Miller, in her first Broadway show, is a pleasant newcomer so seriously handicapped by a silly part that I hesitate to say she hasn't as yet the force to sustain a full-sized musical. She does well enough by such Cole Porterish items as "Song of Two Islands" and "Let's Comb Beaches" and by the whammo first act finale, "America Loves a Band."

Marc Platt, sometime Platoff of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, is wasted on some insistently irrelevant ballets, and Johnny Mack, who suggests the late great Jack Donahue more than a little, does some excellent stepping.

My own stepping was strictly homeward and double time.